



U.S. Department of Justice

Immigration and Naturalization Service

OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS
425 Eye Street N.W.
ULLB, 3rd Floor
Washington, D.C. 20536

Public Copy

File: LIN-00-184-50641

Office: Nebraska Service Center

Date: AUG 1 2001

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:

Petition: Petition for Special Immigrant Religious Worker Pursuant to Section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4), as described at Section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(C)

IN BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

identifying data removed to
prevent clearly unwarranted
invasion of personal privacy

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision in your case. All documents have been returned to the office which originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or the analysis used in reaching the decision was inconsistent with the information provided or with precedent decisions, you may file a motion to reconsider. Such a motion must state the reasons for reconsideration and be supported by any pertinent precedent decisions. Any motion to reconsider must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider, as required under 8 C.F.R. 103.5(a)(1)(i).

If you have new or additional information which you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reopen. Such a motion must state the new facts to be proved at the reopened proceeding and be supported by affidavits or other documentary evidence. Any motion to reopen must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reopen, except that failure to file before this period expires may be excused in the discretion of the Service where it is demonstrated that the delay was reasonable and beyond the control of the applicant or petitioner. Id.

Any motion must be filed with the office which originally decided your case along with a fee of \$110 as required under 8 C.F.R. 103.7.

FOR THE ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER,
EXAMINATIONS

Robert P. Wiemann
for Robert P. Wiemann, Acting Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The immigrant visa petition was denied by the Director, Nebraska Service Center. The matter is now before the Associate Commissioner for Examinations on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a church. It seeks classification of the beneficiary as a special immigrant religious worker pursuant to section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4), in order to employ her as a part-time Sunday school teacher.

The director denied the petition determining that the petitioner failed to establish that the proposed position constitutes a religious occupation for the purpose of special immigrant classification.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner argued that the beneficiary was approved for R-1 classification for the same position and that the regulatory requirements for a religious occupation are identical under the two separate provisions of the Act. Counsel therefore requested that the decision be reversed.

Section 203(b)(4) of the Act provides classification to qualified special immigrant religious workers as described in section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(C), which pertains to an immigrant who:

- (i) for at least 2 years immediately preceding the time of application for admission, has been a member of a religious denomination having a bona fide nonprofit, religious organization in the United States;

- (ii) seeks to enter the United States--

- (I) solely for the purpose of carrying on the vocation of a minister of that religious denomination,

- (II) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization at the request of the organization in a professional capacity in a religious vocation or occupation, or

- (III) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization (or for a bona fide organization which is affiliated with the religious denomination and is exempt from taxation as an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Code of 1986) at the request of the organization in a religious vocation or occupation; and

- (iii) has been carrying on such vocation, professional

work, or other work continuously for at least the 2-year period described in clause (i).

The beneficiary is described as a native and citizen of Korea who last entered in the United States in an undisclosed manner on an unknown date. The record shows that the beneficiary was granted R-1 classification authorized to be employed by the petitioner, such status valid from March 4, 1999 to October 31, 2001. The duties of the position were described as "teaching Bible study and Sunday school, worshipping, and participating in church activities." The total time required for all these activities was estimated by the petitioner to be 27.5 hours.

At issue is whether the proposed position may be considered a religious occupation for the purpose of special immigrant classification.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3) states, in pertinent part, that each petition for a religious worker must be accompanied by:

(ii) A letter from an authorized official of the religious organization in the United States which (as applicable to the particular alien) establishes:

(A) That, immediately prior to the filing of the petition, the alien has the required two years of membership in the denomination and the required two years of experience in the religious vocation, professional religious work, or other religious work.

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(D) That, if the alien is to work in another religious vocation or occupation, he or she is qualified in the religious vocation or occupation. Evidence of such qualifications may include, but need not be limited to, evidence establishing that the alien is a nun, monk, or religious brother, or that the type of work to be done relates to a traditional religious function.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(2) states, in pertinent part, that:

Religious occupation means an activity which relates to a traditional religious function. Examples of individuals in religious occupations include, but are not limited to, liturgical workers, religious instructors, religious counselors, cantors, catechists, workers in religious hospitals or religious health care facilities, missionaries, religious translators, or religious broadcasters.

This group does not include janitors, maintenance workers, clerks, fund raisers, or persons solely involved in the solicitation of donations.

To establish eligibility for special immigrant classification, the petitioner must establish that the specific position that it is offering qualifies as a religious occupation as defined in these proceedings. The statute is silent on what constitutes a "religious occupation" and the regulation states only that it is an activity relating to a traditional religious function. The regulation does not define the term "traditional religious function" and instead provides a brief list of examples. The list reveals that not all employees of a religious organization are considered to be engaged in a religious occupation for the purpose of special immigrant classification. The regulation states that positions such as cantor, missionary, or religious instructor are examples of qualifying religious occupations. Persons in such positions must complete prescribed courses of training established by the governing body of the denomination and their services are directly related to the creed and practice of the religion. The regulation reflects that nonqualifying positions are those whose duties are primarily administrative or secular in nature. Persons in such positions must be qualified in their occupation, but they require no specific religious training or theological education.

The Service therefore interprets the term "traditional religious function" to require a demonstration that the duties of the position are directly related to the religious creed of the denomination, that specific prescribed religious training or theological education is required, that the position is defined and recognized by the governing body of the denomination, and that the position is traditionally a permanent, full-time, salaried occupation within the denomination.

A Sunday school teacher is not considered a qualifying religious occupation within the meaning of section 203(b)(4) of the Act. The proposed position in this matter requires no specific religious training and is traditionally performed by volunteers from among the congregation. Generally, the presentation of religious material to children would not reach a level of sophistication requiring theological education or specialized training contemplated by the statute in providing for the immigration of alien workers. In addition, by definition, a Sunday school program operates on a part-time basis for a few hours on Sundays and is not a full-time salaried occupation.

Clearly, attending the petitioner's worship services or participating in church activities, as was stated by the petitioner, is the normal practice of any member and is not considered a qualifying duty of a religious occupation, even if the petitioning church chooses to pay the alien for that purpose. For

all these reasons, the director's decision will be affirmed.

Counsel argued on appeal that a Form I-129 petition for nonimmigrant religious worker classification was approved by this Service for the same position. Counsel furnished documentation verifying that proceeding. Counsel's argument that identical provisions must be adjudicated in a like manner is acknowledged. In this case, however, it is clear that the nonimmigrant petition for R-1 classification was approved in error. The Service is not bound by past decisions which may have been issued in error. See National Labor Relations Bd. v. Seven-up Bottling Co. of Miami, 344 U.S. 344, 349 (1953).

Beyond the discussion in the director's decision, the petitioner has failed to demonstrate eligibility on other grounds. The petitioner has failed to establish that it has the ability to pay the proffered wage pursuant to 8 C.F.R. 204.5(g)(2); that the beneficiary has the requisite continuous work experience in a qualifying religious occupation for the two years preceding the filing of the petition pursuant to 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3)(ii)(A); or that the beneficiary is qualified to perform a religious occupation pursuant to 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3)(ii)(D). As the appeal will be dismissed on the grounds discussed, these issues need not be examined further.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.